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From Your Commissioner...

Monadnock Regional Loosens Policy on Lambs at School

High school students from Swanzey, Gilsum, Sullivan, Roxbury, Fitzwilliam, Troy and Richmond will be getting new opportunities to learn about agriculture in their own community and the world beyond. A group representing administration, faculty, students and school board members; local conservation, planning, and land trust groups; farmers; and UNH Cooperative Extension 4-H and agricultural educators for Cheshire County, met earlier this month to begin mapping out an ambitious new approach to integrating agriculture and farming into the curriculum of Monadnock Regional High School.

Noting that the school's mission is to provide quality and excellence in education for all students, Principal Brian Pickering asked, "How can we have that without agriculture?" In his first year as principal, Pickering said this vision for excellence requires "offering things outside the typical classroom."

Bruce Barlow, chair of the school board's community relations committee, explained the vision for the new program: 'Growing Our Own—food, people, community and future.' The group plans to start its ambitious and creative plans with small steps, that they hope will lead to a K-12 program—and perhaps even a school farm.

Pickering, whose grandfather farmed in Walpole, expects Growing Our Own to begin with 'extended learning opportunities.' Through ELOs, students earn credit for real-world learning experiences outside of school hours. Community and business partners provide opportunities and mentoring for ELO projects. The idea is to help students find passions for learning by connecting academic work with hands-on learning experiences. A course in agriculture/science is also being discussed by science teachers Jed Butterfield and Eric Skarsten.

Chelsea Kruse, a sophomore at Monadnock from Richmond, shows dairy cattle in 4-H, but is not come from a farm family. She got involved in planning the new program so students can learn about agriculture at their own school.

The next morning after the meeting, Pickering wrote in an email to committee members that he'd had a sign of where all this is heading. "I had a request from a student to bring in her newborn baby lamb today because her parents weren't going to be home, and the lamb needed attention," he wrote. "Your new Ag Friendly principal approved the visit and helped babysit a lamb in the assistant principal's office!!!" There, he said it had "an amazing calming effect" on some of the students.

One can only imagine how pleased all this tale would make poet, editor and novelist Sarah Josepha Hale (1788-1879). The Newport native and literary pioneer is most fondly remembered for 'Mary Had a Little Lamb.'

In big news for the UNH equine program, the school's dressage team won the national championship a week ago in Findlay, Ohio. This is the first time the Intercollegiate Dressage Association national championship has been won by a state university. Previous title-holders were all private colleges. Team members received commemorative saddles, along

with the championship trophy and \$1,000 in scholarship funds for UNH.

Competitors were senior captain Kim Guyer in the first level division, senior Kat Williams-Barnard in the upper training division, senior Bridget Shea in the lower training division, and junior Casey Hoatson in the intro division. The riders with the most points in their divisions represented the 14-member team. Shea, a pre-vet major, won reserve champion individual honors.

"This is a really terrific accomplishment for our team," said coach Sarah Hamilton. "This was a very tough competition and they had challenging horses. They had to ride really hard. They actually finished 10 points ahead of the second-place team. Not one of our riders was below fourth in their division. It was a great team effort all around." This showing will bring lots of positive exposure for the equine program and animal sciences at UNH.

Lorraine Merrill, Commissioner